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## Introduction

In recent decades, Germany has been characterised by its so-called *Erinnerungskultur*, or memory culture, which remembers and commemorates in particular the National Socialist past.<sup>1</sup> Evidence of this is visible in the high-profile cultural and geographical landmarks of the capital, such as Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. Yet even Berlin's initially prominent and controversial memorial projects come to occupy a more established, and thus less conspicuous, place in the city. The position of memorials between visibility and invisibility is nothing new – as Musil famously remarked, there is nothing so inconspicuous as a monument – but (in)visibility is a particular feature of Germany's recent memory culture and the memorials that have been made in this context.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the play between visibility and invisibility underpinned the so-called countermonuments of the 1980s and 1990s, which quite literally undid the form of conventional memorials.<sup>3</sup> Artists like Horst Hoheisel and Jochen Gerz sought provocative alternatives in order to show how grand, imposing structures were not appropriate to the commemoration of the Holocaust, and to challenge how communities engaged with the legacy of National Socialism. For his *2146 Stones – Monument against Racism* (1993), Gerz removed cobbles from the castle square in Saarbrücken and inscribed on their bases the names of Germany's Jewish cemeteries in use before the Second World War. Since this act was carried out at night and the stones replaced with their new inscriptions face down, its provocative force lay not in the memorial's visibility, but in its temporary disruption of public space. As James E. Young notes, the power of such memorials is found in their potential 'not to console but to provoke; [...] not to accept graciously the burden of memory but to throw it back at the town's feet'.<sup>4</sup> But even whilst countermonuments have proved 'insistent, importunate and intrusive',<sup>5</sup> they have nevertheless become a publically accepted part of Germany's memorial landscape – Gerz's illegal intervention was approved and retrospectively commissioned by the regional parliament and the castle square renamed 'Platz des *Unsichtbaren* Mahnmals' [Square of the *Invisible* Monument] (my emphasis). Moreover, as previously unacknowledged legacies of the Third Reich find forms of public commemoration, memorials might be considered a ubiquitous and thus unremarkable feature of the Berlin Republic.<sup>6</sup> We might say that, despite the disruptive potential of many memorial projects, the very fact of their integration makes them a part of the cityscape that no longer stands out.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an account of the shifts in and problems associated with this German culture of memory, see Aleida Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur. Eine Intervention* (Munich: Beck, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Musil, 'Denkmale', *Nachlaß zu Lebzeiten*, in Adolf Frisé, ed., *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978), vol. 7, 506-09 (506).

<sup>3</sup> See James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1993), 27-48.

<sup>4</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 30.

<sup>5</sup> Niven, Bill and Chloe Paver, 'Introduction', *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*, Bill Niven and Chloe Paver, eds, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1-12 (7).

<sup>6</sup> For a survey of these diverse memorial initiatives, see Niven and Paver, eds, *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*.

<sup>7</sup> Recent scholarship has shown how, as a form of urban memory, memorials are threatened by amnesia even as they seem to ward against this (see Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 11-29 and Mark Crinson, 'Urban Memory – An

In what follows, I want to consider how the challenges of Germany's recent memory culture – the imperative to remember and commemorative a traumatic past in appropriate mode – are reflected in the (in)visibility of the memorial form. I will discuss three memorial projects which were initiated more than two decades ago, and so having lost their initial provocative force, are now challenged by their shifting (in)visibility. In the two-part installation *The Missing House* and *The Museum* (1990) French artist Christian Boltanski uses the site of a bombed-out Berlin residence and related documents to evoke the memory of those who disappeared in the war years; in Berlin's Bavarian Quarter, Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock's street sign series, *Orte des Erinnerns (Places of Remembrance)* (1993) documents the systematic exclusion of Jewish citizens in the Third Reich; and with his 'Stolpersteine', or stumbling stones – small brass plaques set in the pavement – the German artist Gunter Demnig commemorates those deported from their homes under National Socialism. Found in relatively inconspicuous locations, on the threshold between private and public spaces, these site-specific memorials provoke an 'unexpected encounter' with the past.<sup>8</sup> They also provided (either incidentally or intentionally) counterpoints to the high-profile controversy surrounding the plans for and construction of an official, centralized Holocaust memorial for Berlin – a monument so visible it can scarcely be avoided. Retrieving and making visible again forgotten traces of war, persecution, and deportation, these artists represent what Margaret Ewing describes as 'a strain of contemporary art practice devoted to historical recovery', made, we might add, via the archive.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the idea of the archive as a site of deposit and preservation is pivotal to their engagement with traces of the past, but it also means their projects gesture towards renewed invisibility and oblivion, and the (in)visibility of their memorials can be understood in terms of the (in)visibility of the archive. It is in the act of withdrawing and concealing that the remnants of the past come to be housed in the archive. As Derrida argues, '[i]t is thus, in this *domiciliation*, this house arrest, that archives take place'.<sup>10</sup> The archive marks the passage between the private and the public, but this does not mean the visibility of the past, rather it exposes what remains as 'spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent "in the flesh", neither visible nor invisible'.<sup>11</sup> In the case of the countermonument, Henry W. Pickford explains, the focus on 'historical research and documentation' displaces, even negates the memorial itself.<sup>12</sup> Yet whilst archival research is fundamental to these projects, both the documentary act and material are arguably displaced by the memorials that emerge and remain visible as a consequence. Like the archives that inform them, the memorials by Boltanski, Stih and Schnock, and Demnig are caught between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, remembering

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Introduction', in Mark Crinson, ed., *Urban Memory: History and Amnesia in the Modern City* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 11-20.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Ewing, 'The Unexpected Encounter. Confronting Holocaust Memory in the Streets of Post-Wall Berlin', in *Rhetoric, Remembrance, and Visual Form: Sighting Memory*, ed. by Anne Teresa Demo, Bradford Vivian (Routledge, 2012), 33-49

<sup>9</sup> Ewing, 'The Unexpected Encounter', 33. Before her analyses of the documentary elements of the memorial projects by Boltanski and Demnig, Ewing discusses Shimon Attie's *The Writing on the Wall* (1991-93), a series of photographic projections onto Berlin buildings, which also uses archive material (35-38).

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 84.

<sup>12</sup> Henry W. Pickford, 'Conflict and Commemoration: Two Berlin Memorials', *Modernism/Modernity* 12(1) (2005), 133-73 (162).

and forgetting. They make visible once more traces housed in the archive, even functioning in turn as a sort of archive, yet in so doing, threaten to conceal these traces again.

The negotiation of (in)visibility in memorial projects does not simply mean privileging the visible over the invisible, however. Rather it concerns their critical, disruptive potential. This is easily lost as they gain public acceptance, but it is crucial if they are to provoke meaningful engagement with the legacy of Germany's violent past. Establishing a link to the past, the archive is pivotal to this negotiation. But it also threatens fixation on the material and documentary, on that which can be formalised and regulated as history, and thus consignment of the messier, uncontainable elements of the past to a space outside representation. As Jean-François Lyotard observes, in 'the anonymity of the archives', there is no space for the 'custom, or story, or rhythm' of memory.<sup>13</sup> According to performance theorist Rebecca Schneider, flesh is the 'blind spot' of the phallogentric, ocularcentric archive, which assumes that 'if it is not visible, or given to documentation [...] or otherwise "houseable" [...] it is lost, disappeared'. But, she insists, flesh 'does ghost bone' in the 'body-to-body-transmission' of the past, which counters the conventionally conceived archive.<sup>14</sup> Whilst the fact of historical violence might disrupt 'body-to-body transmission' in any literal sense, the movement of individuals and communities on and through memorial sites constitutes an important part of the relationship between past and present.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the crucial but perhaps overlooked element of these works by Boltanski, Stih and Schnock, and Demnig is the response they provoke in those who encounter them. Such effects are provisional and change over time, but they indicate the contemporary significance of memorials, memory culture, and Germany's shifting relationship to its recent past.

### **Christian Boltanski, *The Missing House* and *The Museum***

In 1990, following the unification of Germany, an art project was launched which was particularly motivated by questions of visibility and invisibility, and the ways in which Berlin was still marked by topographical, cultural, and ideological difference.<sup>16</sup> Contributions to *Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit* [*The Finitude of Freedom*] were to link the city's two halves, showing how '[t]he visible becomes invisible, the hidden comes to light'.<sup>17</sup> And so the projects negotiated not only between East and West, but also between public and private, used and abandoned spaces. Christian Boltanski responded with a two-part piece, *The Missing House*, on Große Hamburgerstraße in the East (part of the former Jewish district of the Scheunenviertel) and *The Museum*, on a disused exhibition ground near the Lehrter station in the West. Whilst Boltanski's choice of locations reflects the broader focus of Müller's initiative – the fall of the Berlin Wall and Germany's reunification – his piece ultimately returned to older traces of violence, almost but not quite invisible, either despite or because of Unification.

*The Missing House* is the better known half of Boltanski's contribution, and can still be seen by passers-by. It uses the space left by a house bombed during the Second World War, a void in the heart of the street and city, and a sign perhaps of stalled redevelopment

<sup>13</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman. Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), 194.

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2011), 100-02.

<sup>15</sup> Young emphasizes how 'we cannot separate the monument from its public life' (*The Texture of Memory*, 13).

<sup>16</sup> Heiner Müller, 'Berlin Twohearted City', in Wulf Herzogenrath, Joachim Sartorius and Christoph Tannert, eds, *Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit. Berlin 1990* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1990), 9; my translation.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.cultd.net/endlichkeit/> [accessed 01/11/12].

in the East, compared with swift reconstruction in the West. Boltanski first had his assistants research those living there during the war, then he made commemorative plaques with the names, period of occupancy and professions of various residents and affixed them to the firewalls of the adjoining houses.

The archival material brought to light showed that some residents of *The Missing House* were Jewish, thus putting Große Hamburger Straße back on the map as a centre of Jewish life in Berlin, perhaps reinscribing its former name 'Toleranzstraße' [Tolerance Street].<sup>18</sup> This material also formed the basis for the other part of Boltanski's installation, *The Museum*. Like *The Missing House*, this was an open-air installation and comprised ten glass vitrines set out in two rows, each displaying copies of the documents that went some way to describing the fates of the residents. These included property deeds, address books, postcards, photographs, accounts of bombings and documentation relating to deportation. Boltanski installed *The Museum* on a former nineteenth century exhibition ground, which, in 1934, was converted into a national aviation museum, but also used for meetings of the Berlin NSDAP and eventually for the interrogation, torture, and execution of prisoners.<sup>19</sup> It was bombed in 1943 and dismantled in 1951. The site is thus a palimpsest of Berlin history – cosmopolitanism, technological prowess, and fascism. But now these traces are invisible: in the shadow of Berlin's new main station, the park lies abandoned, a staircase the only evidence of its former grandeur. The two-part structure is fundamental to Boltanski's response: in a physical sense, it draws a line between the two halves of the city, whilst showing the still disjointed nature of its East-West topographies, and in a symbolic sense, it uses this physical divide to show the interdependent, but equally disjointed, relationship between domestic and archival spaces, between private lives and public history, and the relative (in)visibility of these spheres. As Aleida Assmann observes, the two parts show how 'memory is not possible without knowledge'.<sup>20</sup> But the division and non-coincidence of *The Missing House* and *The Museum* also makes apparent the difficulty of piecing together the details of lives shattered by war and persecution: we can see the place where these people once lived, but the details of who they were have been displaced to another site, made part of an archival order, available for viewing only temporarily, and in duplicate form.

As Margaret Ewing explains, Boltanski's use of the archive in this project (as in his other work) was also intended to expose 'its inherent limitations'.<sup>21</sup> Between *The Missing House* and the absent or 'missing' architecture of *The Museum*, Boltanski reveals a fundamental concern of memory culture: how can the traces of the past be accommodated in a way that ensures their visibility *and* their preservation? Until the artist's intervention on Große Hamburger Straße, there was no visible sign of the former residents. Any remaining traces could be found elsewhere, in the archive, but making them visible meant taking them out of the order that ensured their safekeeping. Moreover, by using *copies* of documents and protocols of interviews conducted as part of the project, Boltanski emphasised how the availability of these traces was contingent on his own intervention – an archive would never have permitted the unprotected display of original documents, and Boltanski also supplemented these sources with his own. So with both parts of his installation, Boltanski

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<sup>18</sup> Wulf Herzogenrath, 'The Missing House', *Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit*, 84-86 (84).

<sup>19</sup> Benz, Wolfgang and Barbara Distel, eds, *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, vol. 2, (Munich: Beck, 2005), 63-65.

<sup>20</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 364.

<sup>21</sup> Ewing, 'The Unexpected Encounter', 43.

showed how the city had failed both to accommodate *and* keep visible traces of its residents. This failure was underscored when, in this neglected no-man's land, *The Museum* was vandalised after only a few weeks, and when *The Finitude of Freedom* finished later that year, dismantled.<sup>22</sup> In Boltanski's *Museum*, the vitrines were exposed to wilful destruction. This act of vandalism is particularly interesting because it suggests unease about confrontation with the past: *The Museum* was the more visible part of Boltanski's installation, and apparently the most provocative. Whilst it is unclear what motivated the damage, it seems the documentary evidence of persecution and deportation was an unwanted presence in this public space. In the recently reunified city, it was not possible to find a secure place for these traces outside the seclusion of the archive. *The Missing House*, meanwhile, is less conspicuous – it is possible to walk past without noticing it.

The unforeseen damage to *The Museum* changes Boltanski's piece fundamentally. As John Czaplicka notes, without its archival counterpoint, *The Missing House* becomes more like 'the autonomous art object, for this evacuation of information is also an evacuation of history'. Nonetheless, Czaplicka posits the remaining walls as a kind of 'archive' to be read by an 'informed beholder'.<sup>23</sup> But precisely this element is missing: Boltanski's project is, as Eric Santner calls it, an 'archive of absence', and in its dual structure, doubly so; that is, both a repository of absences and a now absent archive.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the remaining installation is less provocative than its missing counterpart and has become integrated into Berlin's self-consciously memorialising cityscape; today *The Missing House* witnesses a steady stream of tourists who pause to take photographs before moving on to the next location on their map of memory culture 'sights'. The legibility of the signs is in fact limited by the gate blocking direct access to the firewalls: close to the synagogue and drawing the gaze of others, they must have some connection with Berlin's Jewish past, but this is increasingly a matter of supposition rather than informed understanding.

### **Stih and Schnock, *Orte des Erinnerns***

Readers of Stih and Schnock's memorial in Berlin's Bavarian Quarter, meanwhile, can be in no doubt as to its meaning. Their signs are found on lampposts around the neighbourhood, and show, on one side, simple pictures and, on the other, official regulations, which clearly state the increasingly inhumane restrictions and prohibitions to which Jewish citizens were subject in the Third Reich. *Places of Remembrance* is a later phase of a memorial project which was initiated in the district of Schöneberg in 1983 and which recovered evidence of over 6,000 deportations from the area, known as 'Jewish Switzerland'. Despite other initiatives and exhibitions, it is the part which has gained and sustained greatest visibility.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Mourning or Melancholia: Christian Boltanski's "Missing House"', *Oxford Art Journal*, 21/2 (1998), 3-20 (7).

<sup>23</sup> John Czaplicka, 'History, Aesthetics, and Contemporary Commemorative Practice in Berlin', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 155-87 (161).

<sup>24</sup> Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 53. Andrew Webber posits Boltanski's *Archiv der deutschen Abgeordneten* (1999) in the basement of the Reichstag as a 'companion piece' to *The Missing House*, 'where the tightly spaced walls also display the emptiness of the archive' (Andrew Webber, *Berlin in the Twentieth Century: A Cultural Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 30).

<sup>25</sup> Margit Sinka has shown how fundamental this work is to an understanding of Stih and Schnock's project (Margit Sinka, 'The "Different" Holocaust Memorial in Berlin's *Bayerisches Viertel*: Personal and Collective Remembrance Thematizing Perpetrator/Victim Relationships', in *Victims and Perpetrators: 1933-45. (Re)Presenting the Past in Post-Unification Culture*, ed. by Laurel Cohen-Pfister and Dagmar Wienröder-Skinner (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2006), pp. 197-221).

Nevertheless, the extraordinary aspect of the memorial is tempered by its likeness to more ubiquitous urban signage: according to Juliet Koss, 'the signs flirt with camouflage, fading into their environment and reappearing with unexpected force'.<sup>26</sup>

Drawing on the extensive documentary research of the neighbourhood and its Jewish residents undertaken as part of the Schöneberg project, Stih and Schnock 'retrieve history' via the archive, presenting these traces of the Nazi past 'in a way that would encourage passersby to take notice and confront the past in the present'.<sup>27</sup> But like Boltanski, Stih and Schnock also draw on the archive in order to call any claim to comprehensive documentation into question: one of their signs shows an image of ordinary box files and on its reverse the regulation 'Akten, deren Gegenstand anti-jüdische Tätigkeiten sind, sind zu vernichten' (Files documenting anti-Jewish activities are to be destroyed). Exposing these 'anti-democratic goals [...] pursued under the cloak of legality',<sup>28</sup> Stih and Schnock also confront us with the unreliability of the archive. Moreover, they suggest how serious the implications of such archival duplicity are for our understanding of the past: following persecution, deportation, and annihilation, the only traces of the neighbourhood's former Jewish residents are predominantly those that have been displaced to the archives. The artists also deviate from their own model, including on few signs extracts from eye-witness accounts instead of anti-Semitic laws. These contrast with the prescriptions of Nazi law and give momentary glimpses of experience recorded and preserved in less official mode. Ultimately, however, the network of signs, like Boltanski's *Missing House*, is now an accepted and integrated part of Berlin's memorial landscape, which has all but lost its disruptive potential. When the signs first appeared, they sparked reactions from alarmed passers-by who thought they were signs of resurgent anti-Semitism. In order to allay such fears, explanatory notes were attached; labelling the memorial as such, these 'meta-signs' made clear that the signs themselves did not speak the law, merely cited it in the name of commemorative art.<sup>29</sup> In this way, the signs are read as examples of memory culture, their historical, juridical function overlaid, if not obscured by a cultural-aesthetic one.

### **Gunter Demnig, *Stolpersteine***

The historical significance of both the Bayerisches Viertel and 15/16 Große Hamburger Straße is underscored, although not necessarily explained, through the presence of small brass plaques in the pavements, instantly recognisable as 'Stolpersteine', or stumbling stones.

Together with thousands of similar stones found across Europe, they form part of a 'decentralized memorial' by the German artist Gunter Demnig.<sup>30</sup> Demnig laid his first 'Stolpersteine' in Berlin in 1996 as part of the project *Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz* [*Artists research Auschwitz* (where 'nach' implies both searching for and in the wake of)]. Artists were to engage with the difficulties of remembering and representing the Holocaust, producing work that would also respond to the fierce debates surrounding the planned

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<sup>26</sup> Juliet Koss, 'Coming to Terms with the Present', *Grey Room* 16 (2004), 116-31 (117).

<sup>27</sup> Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin. Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 155-60 (158).

<sup>28</sup> Pickford, 'Conflict and Commemoration', 167.

<sup>29</sup> Pickford 'Conflict and Commemoration' 166; Pickford notes that the signs' text 'does not denote nor name, but rather *cites*' (165, emphasis in the original).

<sup>30</sup> See Michael Imort, 'Stumbling Blocks: A Decentralized Memorial to Holocaust Victims', *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*, 233-42.

Holocaust memorial.<sup>31</sup> Demnig researched the fate of residents who had been deported from the Kreuzberg district during the Third Reich, then engraved brass plaques with the basic data of name, date of birth, and where known, date and place of death, and laid these in front of their homes. Political, conceptual, and using an element of performance, Demnig's original idea, like other countermonumental art, challenged mainstream, state-endorsed memorials. Setting a few stones in the pavement without permission from the authorities, Demnig was making a clandestine intervention in municipal space, and retracing forgotten lives, unsettling the contemporary urban topography.

Since its modest, localised beginnings, the initiative has grown beyond expectation, with over 45,000 stones laid in over 500 towns across Europe.<sup>32</sup> Demnig has been praised (and honoured) for creating a memorial that subverts conventional modes of commemoration, dispersing public attention away from single sites. As the artist says, you don't *have* to visit a museum, but people can't help stumbling across his stones.<sup>33</sup> Demnig's site-specific memorial aims to return the names of the victims to the last place of voluntary residence, an act of restitution performed with the words 'hier wohnte...' [... lived here]. The stones are located in a physical sense on the threshold between private and public spaces, but also in a metaphorical sense, between the homes of deportees and the archives that hold the last information about their fate. Indeed, each stone requires archival research in order to bring hidden traces to light. This was undertaken initially by the artist and often by relatives, but increasingly local communities also uncover the traces of vanished residents. Of course, this poses questions about who is commemorated and who is not, and the motivation for those with no personal connection to victims to become involved in researching selected biographies.<sup>34</sup> Thus Demnig's project adopts a precarious position between municipal monument and personal memorial, and between a desire for visibility and invisibility.

As well as its supporters, Demnig's project has many dissenters: notoriously, Munich's local council has refused to allow the stones in municipal spaces, and particularly in the former East Germany, stones have been vandalised, even removed. In 2012 protesters covered 'Stolpersteine' in Wismar with steel plates inscribed with the names of Wehrmacht soldiers, and on the anniversary of the November Pogrom that year, right-wing extremists were suspected of forcefully removing eleven 'Stolpersteine' from the pavements of Greifswald.<sup>35</sup> Such acts suggest a similarly destructive impulse to that shown towards Boltanski's *Museum*, underscoring how making the traces housed in archives visible also makes them vulnerable. But beyond these isolated incidents, the stones have found acceptance in the wider community (an appeal in Greifswald quickly raised six times more

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<sup>31</sup> [http://www.germangalleries.com/NGBK/Bakunin-ein\\_Denkmal.html](http://www.germangalleries.com/NGBK/Bakunin-ein_Denkmal.html)  
accessed 15 November 2012.

<sup>32</sup> The development of Demnig's project is nicely documented in Dörte Franke's film *Stolpersteine* (Hanfgarn & Ufer, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Anne Goebel, 'Neue Diskussion über die "Stolpersteine"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17 May 2010.

<sup>34</sup> For a further discussion of these questions, see my 'Mal d'archive: On the Growth of Gunter Demnig's *Stolperstein-Project*', *Paragraph*, forthcoming November 2014.

<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2012-11/stolpersteine-greifswald-geschaendet> and <http://ino.blogspot.de/2012/09/23/wismar-stolpersteine-mit-stahlplatten-ueberklebt/> accessed 30 November 2013.



than was needed to replace the vandalised stones).<sup>36</sup> As the name implies, 'Stolpersteine' are supposed to stop us in our tracks, but Demnig's stones have also become part of the urban fabric, and thus rather unobtrusive. The stones are no longer laid illegally, but rather by appointment, and with written consent from local authorities, and since most people know what the stones represent in a broad sense, their potential to disrupt everyday life has diminished. Moreover, as the project has grown in popularity, the stones threaten to displace the individual victims they claim to commemorate. In other words, whilst the stones initially made visible those lives that had fallen into oblivion, as they become more ubiquitous, they are seen first and foremost as an example of Demnig's memorial. Despite Demnig's emphatic positioning of 'Stolpersteine' outside museum spaces, they are increasingly found behind glass, that is, as exhibits. In Munich, where the stones are banned, supporters have organised exhibitions in order to make the project prominent in other ways and other places.<sup>37</sup> Whilst the Munich ban suggests that 'Stolpersteine' still have the potential to provoke, such initiatives, which aim to counter objections, cast a particularly reverential light on the project, promoting it as an integral but ultimately inoffensive part of Germany's contemporary memory culture. Such exhibitions are also troubling because they use the names and identities of deportees to showcase Demnig's project. When 'Stolpersteine' are put on display, this questions who or what is being commemorated: the stones, the victims, or the artist's idea? When in 2010 Demnig was invited to display 'Stolpersteine' in the German pavilion of the Expo in Shanghai, his stones became visual artefacts in an ultimately nationalistic exhibition.<sup>38</sup> But what is it that is perceived here as typically or even exemplarily 'German'? Demnig's art, 'Stolpersteine' as memorial, or the way in which Germans have engaged with the legacy of fascism? And above all, who decides which names will be put on display, and on what grounds?

The 'Stolperstein' outside Boltanski's *Missing House* also suggests an exhibit, seen not only (or no longer) as a provocation, but as an example of a memory culture phenomenon. Indeed, this juxtaposition questions what is visible here. It seems that these two different projects shape Berlin's memorial landscape by supplementing each other: the work of the French Jewish artist stands alongside that of the German; the vertical memorial stands next to the horizontal; and Boltanski's use of a now exposed residence borders Demnig's use of the liminal space between private and public. Found in such close proximity, they seem to combine, heightening the visibility of the lives commemorated. But their juxtaposition in fact produces obscurity, emphasizing the invisibility of the absent community. At first glance, it appears Demnig's 'Stolperstein' for Herbert Budzislowski is dedicated to the same H. Budzislowski commemorated on one of Boltanski's plaques, and that the information provided by Boltanski is supplemented by Demnig's later intervention: according to Boltanski, H. Budzislowski lived at 15/16 Große Hamburger Straße between 1933 and 1942, and Demnig's stone tells us Herbert Budzislowski was executed at Berlin-Plötzensee in 1943.

But the two plaques actually commemorate two people: H. Budzislowski was a *female* poultry seller (*Geflügelhändlerin*); unlike her son, Hedwig was not executed at Plötzensee,

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.ndr.de/regional/mecklenburg-vorpommern/stolpersteine171.html> accessed 30 November 2013. According to a press spokesperson for Cologne, the project has won the acceptance on which it depends (Goebel, 'Neue Diskussion über die "Stolpersteine"').

<sup>37</sup> <http://alt.stolpersteine-muenchen.de/Archiv/docu.htm> accessed 15 November 2012.

<sup>38</sup> The invitation was announced on the 'Stolpersteine' website but has since been removed <http://www.stolpersteine.com/DE/chronik.html> accessed 19 October 2011.

but deported, probably to Riga.<sup>39</sup> The two memorials set out some coordinates, but the use of such minimal data threatens to reduce two biographies to one. Herbert Budzislowski was executed for his involvement with the Herbert Baum resistance movement, but as a Jewish Communist who had same-sex relationships, he was a Nazi target on several levels.<sup>40</sup> Yet even as Budzislowski is commemorated, the contours of his identity are flattened out and his name becomes barely distinguishable from that of his mother. Neither plaque makes details visible. Rather, flush against their respective vertical and horizontal planes, they make the lives they commemorate relatively inconspicuous.

To conclude, I would like to turn to a different project also made on Germany's streets, but shown in gallery spaces. This project equally negotiates the (in)visibility of memory and the archive, but retains more disruptive potential than the site-specific memorials discussed. Following an encounter with a Berlin street sign that read 'Jüdenstraße' or 'Jews' Street', the American-born artist Susan Hiller researched, indexed, and archived all 303 streets in Germany that still carry the word 'Jew' in their name. The resulting *J. Street-Project* (2002-2005) comprised a video, a series of photographs, and a book. As Mark Godfrey notes, whilst Hiller provided an apparently complete archive, her project was haunted by the loss of the Jewish communities it retraced.<sup>41</sup> The artist explains:

Ghosts are invisible to most people but visible to a few. [...] These street names are ghosts of the past, haunting the present. [...] Although the name was clearly meant as a respectful commemoration, [...] it seemed to me there was a strange ambiguity in retaining or restoring the name of a street commemorating people who had been exterminated within living memory.<sup>42</sup>

Revealing the 'existing archive, which lies hidden in the folds of the German landscape', Hiller shows the country's complex, palimpsestic history in relation to Jewish presence and absence.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, these street signs are both burdened with, and evacuated of, historical significance. Surrounded by other, mundane urban signs, the *J. Street* signifier is not always apparent, and its meaning is a matter of speculation.

Although absence seems to dominate the *J-Street Project*, it does not focus only on ghosts. Whilst many of the places are seemingly devoid of human presence, this is often intimated through signs of recent traffic – human, animal, commercial, vehicular. Hiller could have framed her shots to focus on the street sign alone, but often she includes indications of life in the various communities – residential streets with open windows, a door left ajar, washing on the line, a car with its headlights on. And people are in fact visible in almost 60 of 303 photographs. Notably, Hiller captures them in motion, making the movement of bodies through the frame a recurring feature of her still images. Consequently the majority of these figures are slightly blurred, caught with legs raised, just leaving or entering the frame; they are walking along streets, shopping, riding bicycles, driving municipal or

<sup>39</sup> Regina Scheer, *Im Schatten der Sterne. Eine jüdische Widerstandsgruppe* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2004), 197-202.

<sup>40</sup> [http://www.hirschfeld.in-berlin.de/frame.html?http://www.hirschfeld.in-berlin.de/gedenken/herbert\\_budzislowski.html](http://www.hirschfeld.in-berlin.de/frame.html?http://www.hirschfeld.in-berlin.de/gedenken/herbert_budzislowski.html) accessed 17 May 2013; Scheer, *Im Schatten der Sterne*, 197.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Godfrey, *Abstraction and the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 265.

<sup>42</sup> Susan Hiller, 'Introduction', *The J. Street Project* (Compton Verney and Berlin: Compton Verney/DAAD, 2005), 6.

<sup>43</sup> Uriel Orlow, 'Latent Archives, Roving Lens', in Jane Connarty and Josephine Lanyon, eds, *Ghosting: The Role of the Archive within Contemporary Artists' Film and Video* (Bristol: Picture this Moving Image, 2006), 34-47 (41).

agricultural vehicles. The movement of bodies across the frame is also integral to her film, where sporadic traffic contrasts with long periods of stasis. Thus, as well as revealing absence, Hiller's project captures life, and these mundane snapshots in fact disrupt any reverent contemplation of these scenes as memorials to vanished communities. Hiller resists the stasis and smooth surfaces of integrated installations like those by Boltanski, Stih and Schnock, and Demnig, instead layering her images with the signs of life and death across history, with the human traffic that constitutes and changes communities, and which cannot be easily arrested. For instance, Hiller captures evidence of contemporary migrant or ethnic communities, causing the street signs to reverberate with new significance where these people are present, though often still socially invisible, in Germany's towns and cities. These figures do not clarify the meaning of the 'J-Street' signs, rather they complicate our understanding of Germany's past and present. But precisely by agitating her images with movement in and across communities, Hiller shows Germany's relationship to both its past and present, with all its contradictions and instabilities. In this sense, Hiller confronts us with the 'flesh', that which resists accommodation in the archive, but which constitutes and carries collective memory.<sup>44</sup> Whereas the site-specific projects discussed above have become integrated almost seamlessly into the everyday urban fabric, Hiller's exhibition pieces provide a more challenging encounter with contemporary Germany: small but disruptive details, such as the everyday movement of these bodies, represent what cannot be integrated into neat municipal histories accommodated in the archives; it persists as a reminder of all that is unresolved and contested about Germany's past and its contemporary identity.

Of course, as a gallery piece, Hiller's work is seen by fewer people than site-specific memorials. But it offers a particularly revealing image of contemporary Germany in relation to its recent past. As such, it might be seen as another kind of memorial project, and as part of Germany's memory culture in all its controversy and contradiction. The recent proliferation of such projects means they do not stand alone, rather, like *The Missing House* and 'Stolpersteine', they overlap. This does not guarantee prominence, however. Caught between visibility and invisibility, between public and private spaces, these installations gesture instead towards the importance of reading the traces of the past carefully, and as part of a more extensive narrative, one that cannot be confined to the archives, but which spills out onto the streets and into communities. In this sense, site-specific memorials are most interesting for the responses they elicit: the damage done to Boltanski's *Museum* shows resistance to seeing the traces of the past in public spaces, whereas the integration of *The Missing House* into Berlin's tourist trail results in an essentially standard response, where tourists pause to photograph the plaques before moving on. Stih and Schnock's signs were intended to confront a contemporary audience with the same prohibitions imposed on Jewish citizens, but the addition of a reassuring 'meta-sign' to explain that these statements are mere citation causes the individual victims to recede and gives greatest visibility to the memorial itself. Demnig's 'Stolpersteine' retain the potential to provoke, as seen in Munich and the isolated instances of vandalism, but the increasing focus on the project and its supporters reduces the visibility of those named on the stones. As James Young explains, the sometimes hostile response to Jochen and Esther Gerz's, *Monument against Fascism* in the German town of Harburg (1986) was an inherent part of this countermemorial, one which betrayed 'not only the Germans' secret desire that all these monuments just

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<sup>44</sup> Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 100-02.

disappear, but also the urge to strike back at such memory'. In the case of the memorials discussed here, initial provocation gives way to acceptance, a response which may signal tolerance and a shift away from this 'secret desire' for disappearance, on the one hand, but on the other, suggests that such memorial projects are seen as unremarkable, an inherent part of memory culture in the Berlin Republic. Either way, acceptance of, even attachment to, these memorial objects as part of Germany's self-consciously memorialising topography risks obscuring the events or lives they commemorate.